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Notes

[Contributions in the form of notes or discussions should be sent to John A. Scott, Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill.]

HOMER AND LITTLE FISHES

In a recent article in the Classical Weekly, (15, 164) Mr. Fraser makes the attractive and interesting suggestion that the Homeric heroes abstained from fish because of a tabu that the common people were not required to observe. That the heroes did abstain, that is, that they ate fish only when driven by dire necessity, is a commonplace of ancient and modern Homeric study. It is not as often explicitly stated, but it ought to be, that the common people ate fish freely,—indeed it was one of their important food-staples. "And the black earth bears wheat and barley," says Odysseus, (Od. xix, 111–114, Lang's Tr.) "and the trees are laden with fruit, and the sheep bring forth and fail not, and the sea gives store of fish, and all out of his good guidance, and the people prosper under him." Amidst these visible signs of a people's prosperity, no mention, we notice, is made of the fat cattle and fatter swine, in which the heroes delighted,—when they could get them. The social dietary cleft is marked enough.

But is the cleft based on religion, as Mr. Fraser argues, or on the humdrum fact that the poet thought fish wretchedly bad food, as Professor Scott believes (Class. Journ. 12, 328; 17, 226; Unity of Homer, pp. 6 seq.)? Well, both reasons are good ones. It many places, we know, fishes were not eaten because they were holy, and not because they were poor in quality. And some of these places were much nearer than Peru and Sumatra, which Mr. Fraser found in the Golden Bough. The author of the Golden Bough in a note to Pausanias, iv, 153–154, has collected a number of instances of veneration of fishes closer to the Scamander, one in Smyrna itself. And if the word "hieros" in Homer always meant "tabu," the case would have been proved, because Homer speaks of ἱερὸν ἰχθύν, "a sacred fish" (Il. xvi, 407). In later Greek, ἱερός does mean "tabu," among other things. But we can scarcely say it does in Homeric usage, unless threshing-floors are tabu, (Il. v, 499) and sentinels (Il. x, 56) and the like.

There is another consideration, however, that weakens Mr. Fraser's position. Some things in ancient Greece could not be eaten because they were religiously unclean. But when people refrain for that reason, they generally tell us so. The Homeric heroes, on the contrary, plainly state that when they refrain, they do so because they despise fish as a food. At least they eat it only under protest, driven by gnawing hunger. And nothing happens to them. Now, that is quite irregular for tabus. If this was a violation, their hunger would have constituted no excuse, any more than a guiltless shedder of blood in later Hellas, was saved from miasma by his innocence, or the

companions of Odysseus, who had killed the Sun's cattle in desperate need, were saved by their extremity from the god's wrath, (Od. xii, 327 seq.).

In one or two Mediterranean regions, where fish were indubitably holy, the inference that people drew as to the propriety of eating them, was just the opposite to that which Mr. Fraser supposes Homeric people to have drawn. The Syrians and Philistines certainly worshipped or venerated fishes, but instead of the nobles abstaining and the commons partaking, in Askelon the dignitaries, i.e., the priests,—and they alone—, ate of the holy thing. So Mnaseas tells us, (ap. Athenaeus, vii, 8, 346d), and it was something that even an irresponsible marvel-monger might have seen with his own eyes. Here, too, with a real fish-tabu in operation, the consequences were the normal ones. Those who ate fish were afflicted with sores or ulcers. (Selden, De Dis Syr., 2, 3; Enc. Bib. s.v. fish; Robertson Smith, Rel. of Sem. 292.)

Professor Scott thinks Homer may have been a Smyrnaean, as the best authenticated ancient tradition held. At the present day, the river fish in the neighborhood of Smyrna are very poor. Since there is every reason to believe that the situation has not materially changed even in three thousand years, Homer may have grown up with a contempt for fish, and ascribed to his heroes a lordly distaste for them. But as Mr. Fraser points out, Smyrna was a sea-port, and it is quite possible that whatever may have been the quality of the river-fish, the sea-fish were good. Indeed, in later times, many of the cities on the Asiatic coast, whether on the Aegean, the Propontis, or the Euxine, were famous fish-marts from which fish of all sorts were exported to all parts of the world. Smyrna was not very far from the Hellespont, and to "carry fish to the Hellespont," ἰχθὺν εἰς Ἑλλήσποντον, was as proverbially futile as to carry coals to Newcastle. To come very close to our region, Schliemann found what he thought were the vertebrae of tunny fish and dog-fish in the ruins of the third or fourth city on the hill at Hissarlik (Ilios, pp. 360, 364).

But the fact that some cities on the Asiatic coast were fish-marts, does not quite establish that Smyrna was one. Indeed, in the not infrequent enumeration of sources of the fish-supply, we shall find Smyrna mentioned only in a particular way. Oribasius, for example, quotes Xenocrates *in extenso* on the subject of fish (ii, 58, p. 151, Bussenaker and Daremberg). We learn there that Smyrna was known only for its sea-squirts, or ascidians, which Homeric society probably had not yet learned to enjoy. And the Dorian who wrote On Fishes, (ap. Athen. 319 d) speaks of the size and variety of all species of sharks in Smyrna and the Gulf of Smyrna. The other great Ionian sea-port, Miletus, was especially famous for "sea-wolves," *lupi*, λάβρακες, a large and ravenous fish, sometimes identified, but dubiously, with the sea-bass.

The presence of such fish may have meant that other fish were plentiful; but it does seem rather likely that the larger and more succulent of food fishes shunned such grisly company, and that the sea-wolves fed on the smaller fishes that teemed in these waters. So that, neither in the sea, nor in the streams, would a native of Smyrna find such material for training a nice palate in the discrimination of fishes.

The instance of veneration of fishes at Smyrna, that has been referred to is given to us in an inscription, (Dittenberger, Syll. 2nd ed. No. 584). But the fish here are those of a sacred pool, ἰχθυτρόφιον, and the pool was unquestionably dedicated to Atargatis, the Dea Syria. It therefore tells us nothing of Smyrnaean practise.

All this cannot prove that Homer was a Smyrnaean. But if he was, it will explain why he might have defined a gentleman as a man who disdained to eat fish.

MAX RADIN

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

APOLLO AS AN ASIATIC DIVINITY

In an address delivered in Oxford in 1908 Professor von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff advocated the theory that Apollo was an Asiatic god taken over by the Greeks, and that in Homer this divinity was still regarded as foreign and hostile. He argues also that the Homeric Apollo has few of the attributes of the later Hellenic god.

These quotations will show the basis of his theory: p. 28: "In Homer Apollo makes no music, no prophecy."; p. 31: "It is not until Hesiod and Greece proper that the Muses form a choir for Apollo's harping."; p. 29: "The only reference to Delphi and its treasures comes in a poem whose geographical horizon is different from all the rest."; p. 31: "Apollo bears the name Letoïdes: it is the only metronymic in Olympus, and it was only among the Lycians that sons bore their mothers' names."; p. 33: "Apollo was the alien and hostile god."

His four arguments will be taken up in the above order: 1) *Apollo makes no music in Homer and is not connected with the Muses.* At the close of the feast of the gods at the end of the first book of the Iliad we have these words: "There was no lack of the lyre which Apollo had, nor of the Muses who sang responding with melodious voice." In the last book of the Iliad, verse 63, Hera tells how Apollo had brought his lyre to the wedding of Peleus and Thetis. When Odysseus listened to the song of Demodocus, Odyssey viii, 488, he asked him the source of his music, "Did the Muse teach you, or even Apollo himself?"

2) *Apollo is no prophet and is not connected with Delphi, except in one late passage.*

Iliad IX, 405: "The rich shrine of Phoebus Apollo, in rocky Pytho." Odyssey viii 79: "Thus Phoebus Apollo gave oracular response to him, in goodly Pytho, when he crossed over the stone threshold for the purpose of consulting the god." Besides these positive references we have inferences of his prophetic skill in such expressions as o 526, "As he spake a bird of omen flew on his right, a hawk, the swift messenger of Apollo;" and o 245 where the seer Amphiaraüs is called "the beloved of Apollo."

3) *The metronymic Letoïdes shows Lycian connections, since only in Lycia were such names used.*

This is, no doubt, based on the story of the Lycians as told in Herodotus I, 173. Stein in his great edition of Herodotus makes the following comment